



Army civil affairs interaction with Iraqi tribal leaders

55th Signal Company (Kevin P. Bell)

# Are We Ready for an Interagency Combatant Command?

By CHRISTOPHER L. NALER

**A**s the United States conducts the war on terror, it is evident from experience, doctrine, and strategy that the conflict will not be resolved solely through either military strength or diplomatic maneuvering. The combination of all instruments of national power allows the United States and its allies the full spectrum of options to respond to

and deter terrorist and conventional threats. Is the Nation agile enough to respond globally, short of a major theater war? The operations conducted after September 11, 2001, in the Philippines and Central and Southwest Asia prove that we can respond, but are we postured to sustain this war and, at the same time, prepare for future conflicts? This article argues that an integrated civil-mili-

tary combatant command is the model for the United States to deter and defeat adversaries and engage regional partners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Properly structured to include interagency representation, a combatant commander's headquarters and associated staff would provide the nucleus for interagency reorganization.

## The Interagency Process

The Armed Forces routinely participate in interagency operations in the United States

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and abroad. Early inclusion of interagency considerations in military assessments, estimates, and plans would facilitate civil-military integration of effort. The interagency process in the United States, under the National Security Council, focuses on the appropriate functions for military and non-military participants and facilitates unified action in pursuit of national objectives.

Deterrence and engagement are dynamic responsibilities tasked primarily to unified combatant commanders through the

National Military Strategy and Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan. The Department of State, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and other agencies are the key players;

each can become lead Federal agencies in the National Security Strategy (NSS). The single entity that coordinates these efforts is the

*National Security Council (NSC), the President's principal forum for considering national security and foreign policy matters with his senior national security advisors and cabinet officials. The NSC also serves as the President's principal arm for coordinating these policies among various government agencies.<sup>1</sup>*

This 1949 construct may have been sufficient in the Cold War, but the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires greater agility to respond to both domestic and foreign threats. The NSC is the correct model for planning and assessing our national security strategy, but it is not optimized to coordinate and implement this strategy on a daily basis. General Peter Pace, USMC, as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, pointed out that there was no one underneath the President who could follow through on decisions and order different agencies to accomplish what must be accomplished. He asked, "Do we then need a Goldwater-Nichols—like event for the interagency?"<sup>2</sup>

The success of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 is evident when an empowered unified combatant command leads a coalition of over 40 countries in multiple regions executing the war on terror. The intent of the act has come to fruition in less than 20 years. In Iraq, for instance, "the capabilities and

capacities of the U.S. military on that battlefield were finally the realization of the dream that was the Goldwater-Nichols Act."<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. Government is now ready to follow the DOD lead and embrace unifying legislation that extends this integration beyond the military. General Pace continues his challenge to the interagency through the lens of 30 years of observation: "In the 1980s, we had the best Army, the best Navy, the best Air Force, and the best Marine Corps in the world, but they did not work jointly.

Arguably today, we have a great State Department, a great Department of Defense, a great Department of Treasury"<sup>4</sup> that are not working jointly. General Anthony

Zinni, USMC (Ret.), former commander of U.S. Central Command, offers a corresponding perspective: "In Washington there is no one place, agency, or force that directs interagency cooperation. The only such cooperation is on an ad hoc, person-to-person or group-to-group basis. So if you have a problem like putting Iraq back together after Saddam . . . there's nowhere to start."<sup>5</sup> General Zinni's comment coupled with General Pace's challenge coalesce the observations of two former combatant commanders on where problems exist and potential remedies might be found.

An integrated civil-military combatant command is the model for the United States to deter and defeat adversaries and engage regional partners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Properly structured to include interagency representation, a combatant commander's headquarters and associated staff would provide the nucleus for reorganization. Integrating interagency representatives into key leadership and staff positions would create a cohesive group that would feel the pulse of the region and be guided by the NSS to follow the President's intent. This operational headquarters would serve as the strategic interpreter for subordinate units and institutions within the area of responsibility (AOR). The geographic and functional combatant commanders would possess the infrastructure and resources to assemble an integrated civil-military staff that incorporates the capabilities into a model for unity of effort. The characteristics of each interagency partner

would reside in one organization empowered to plan, execute, and assess complex contingency operations with the full measure of the combined instruments of national power.

### Instruments of National Power

As a direct result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, the National Security Strategy for Combating Terrorism outlined an expanded version of the instruments of national power:

*The struggle against international terrorism is different from any other war in our history. We will not triumph solely or even primarily through military might. We must fight terrorist networks, and all those who support their efforts to spread fear around the world, using every instrument of national power—diplomatic, economic, law enforcement, financial, information, intelligence, and military. Progress will come through the persistent accumulation of successes—some seen, some unseen.<sup>6</sup>*

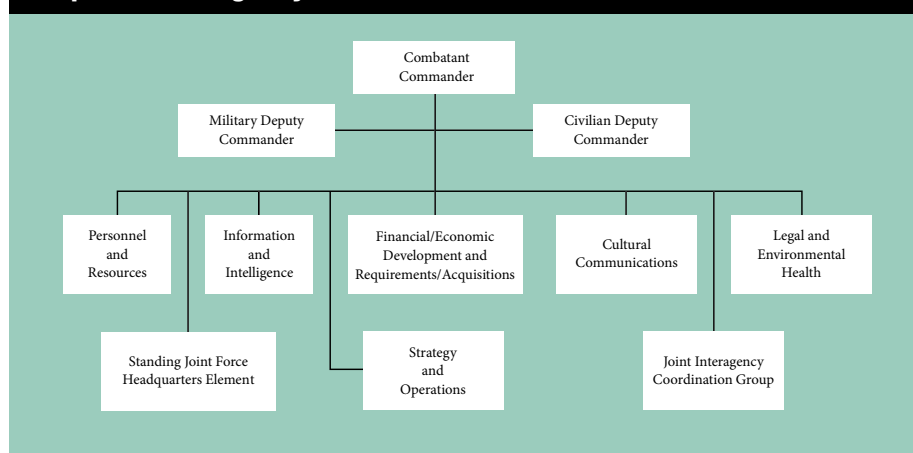
The traditional diplomatic, information, military, and economic instruments are listed, but the USA PATRIOT Act expanded the role of the Department of Justice and this is evident in the purpose of the legislation: "To deter and punish terrorist acts in the United States and around the world, to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools, and for other purposes." This expanded horizon for the Justice Department illustrates the acknowledgment of capabilities that have historically existed but were not stated in the NSS.

Absent from the list is the acknowledgment of U.S. health care and environmental capabilities. As a leader in these areas, the United States provides a breadth of knowledge to assist regional partners in preserving life and natural resources. This capability is beyond the common perception of deterrence, but it could serve critical needs if coordinated with other instruments of national power. This is the heart of regional engagement, and it could be the vanguard for U.S. engagement in Africa and Asia.

A more inclusive list of instruments of national power should include diplomatic, informational, military, economic, law enforcement, financial, and health and environmental. Recognizing the additional instruments of power would bring supplementary agencies into the overall effort for both domestic and foreign activities. The

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## Proposed Interagency Command Structure



representation of each instrument in an integrated combatant command would link the operational headquarters to the individual agencies' strategy within a regional construct.

Equipping regional combatant commanders with the full spectrum of interagency representation would create agile, engaged, and responsive organizations. The ability to interpret and execute strategy at the operational level headquarters would provide continual engagement through all agencies represented in the headquarters and afford all participants a role in responding to conflicts and contingencies. Representatives or teams would maintain communication with their respective agencies and communicate relevant information through the integrated staffs to the combatant commanders, which would lead to greater agility and diversity of perspectives on the combatant commanders' staffs and increase problem-solving capabilities accordingly.

### Headquarters and Staff Concept

A typical unified combatant command headquarters, circa 2005, has a traditional structure that reflects the principal staff directorates. Using this structure as the baseline, I propose the staff concept shown the figure above, which would incorporate interagency representation into the directorates. Each of these new staff sections is described below.

**Command Group.** The combatant commander would be retained in the current structure with a four-star general or admiral. The commander's responsibilities would remain as written in Title 10, United States Code. Who the commander reports to is con-

tentious. One solution is legislation authorizing the Secretary of Defense oversight of agencies outside of his department, allowing the chain of command to remain intact and provide unity of effort. The commander's oversight would be similar to a tactical control relationship, directing the other agencies only in the roles and missions prescribed by their cabinet level secretaries.

Deputy commanders are congruent with the Army model of an assistant division commander (support) and assistant division commander (maneuver). The civilian deputy commander is drawn from the State Department's Senior Executive Service (SES). The deputy is an experienced State executive or, in the case of U.S. Northern Command, a Department of Justice executive. The State Department position fulfills the prerequisite to assignment as a bureau director. The deputy is concurrently the ranking State representative and the director of the Joint Interagency Coordination Group. In the absence of the commander, the deputy would fill the billet and operate within Title 10 parameters.

The military deputy commander is a DOD O-9 and would serve in accordance with current Title 10 requirements. He would be required to perform the duties of the commander in the event of vacancy.

**Principal Staff.** Principal and deputy directors would include a combination of civilian and military personnel. The command group, in conjunction with the assistant departmental secretaries from the various agencies, would provide nominees to maintain parity in the staff composition (see figure).

The Directorate of Personnel and Resources would combine the functions of

traditional J-1 and J-4 sections. The director is a DOD Human Resource SES-2 and the deputy is a DOD O-7. The directorate conducts joint and interagency billet management as a primary function similar to the current supervision of joint billets within DOD. Each agency is responsible for recruiting, selecting, and managing qualified personnel. The directorate works with the military components and participating agencies in prioritizing resources with a foundation stemming from the traditional categories of military supplies. The prioritization of these resources, in support of the commander's engagement strategy or crisis response, provides the interagency staff and subordinate units a unified effort at the regional headquarters.

The Directorate of Financial/Economic Development and Requirements/Acquisitions would combine the J-7, J-8, and J-9 staff functions in current unified combatant command structures. The director is a Department of the Treasury or Department of Commerce SES and the deputy a DOD O-7. Experimentation, transformation, and research and development would reside at U.S. Joint Forces Command. The directorate maintains the traditional budgeting requirements of the command, but economic development is its key function. The directorate has the expertise and ability to communicate with regional partners to engage all facets of the economic environment (such as infrastructure, agriculture, banking, market economy, currency valuation, and trade imports/exports) that assist the Nation in regional and potential global market participation. This economic element is a core capability that complements the daily engagement strategy of a combatant command. As a barometric instrument that measures the economic environment, the directorate provides a wealth of information to the commander, his staff, and the associated agencies as they monitor the AOR.

The Directorate of Strategy and Operations would merge the J-3 and J-5 responsibilities. Its director is an O-8 and the deputy is a DOD SES-2. The directorate contains the traditional current operations, future operations, and plans sections as well as an exercise division. Additionally, it possesses the hub for staff action in the Operational Planning Element, which facilitates all planning requirements pertaining to exercises and operations. The element is a cross-func-



tional planning cell of military and civilian expertise. Each directorate would have representation in planning and execution of the command's mission, directed by Strategy and Operations and orchestrated through the Operational Planning Element.

The Directorate of Information and Intelligence would combine the J-2 and J-6 functions. The director is a CIA SES-2 and the deputy an O-8. Intelligence is fused from multiple sources and authorities:

- Title 10, Armed Forces (DOD)
- Title 18, Crimes and Criminal Procedure (Justice)
- Title 22, Foreign Relations and Inter-course (State)
- Title 50, War and National Defense (CIA) intelligence resources.

Combining information and intelligence into one directorate would provide efficiency in the analysis and dissemination to decisionmakers. Management of bandwidth is collocated with the highest volume consumers.

The Directorate of Cultural Communications would employ a State SES-2

career diplomat as director, with a DOD O-8 as deputy. The director is a unique feature of this integrated staff. The Secretary of State appoints this position as a capstone for grooming executive leaders and Ambassadors. The ability to combine regional exper-

### combining information and intelligence into one directorate provides efficiency in the analysis and dissemination to decisionmakers

tise with mature diplomatic relationships provides unmatched access for engagement in the AOR. Subordinate staff directors fill such billets as coalition support groups, political advisers, and religious and tribal envoys. The director coordinates with area Ambassadors and chiefs of mission and conducts liaison with nongovernmental, private volunteer, and international organizations to balance the regional network and information exchange.

The Directorate of Legal and Environmental Health would focus on legal and health issues in the AOR. The director is a Department of Health and Human Services SES-1 assisted by a DOD O-7 staff judge advocate or a Justice Department SES. The

director provides expertise throughout the spectrum from personal to institutional health issues. The assistant director has expertise in environmental concerns ranging from conservation to development. The deputy director has oversight of U.S. legal issues

in conjunction with regional requirements through close coordination with the director of cultural communications. The deputy's primary duty consists of the traditional staff judge advocate and legal adviser roles.

The Standing Joint Force (SJF) Headquarters Core Element would be an additional duty for one of the Directorate of Strategy and Operations deputies. The director is a DOD O-7 and leads the SJF headquarters to augment the designated Service component command to form the initial nucleus for the joint task force (JTF) staff. Interaction with the integrated staff provides unmatched synergy for the JTF commander through direct access to all appropriate

**State Department representative  
and Marines working with  
citizens in Al Anbar**



Marine Division Combat Camera (James J. Vooris)



Refugees' International officials meeting with Pakistani military during Operation Lifeline, December 2005

30th Space Communications Squadron (Barry Loo)

agencies in one headquarters. This core element corresponds with current joint doctrine, but staff representation would allow the JTF commander to focus on operational and tactical issues by reducing some strategic layers in the current staff model.

The Joint Interagency Coordination Group would be organized in accordance with current doctrine. Staff representation provides the JTF commander with resident expertise in the headquarters and facilitates unity of effort throughout the command by integrating interagency members into the staff and eliminating the necessity for multiple reach-back nodes once deployed. The interagency composition of the headquarters allows the group to focus on tactical coordination and direct support of the JTF. The combatant headquarters works the seam between operational authorities and strategic diplomacy. This affords the JTF commander a strategic shield and allows a focused effort on the current crisis.

### Professional Education

The organization of the staff as shown in the figure would provide the framework for interagency integration. Sustaining the billets and grooming the right individuals for

various positions would be the responsibility of individual agencies. Recruiting and selecting could thus require personnel to depart from traditional career paths. DOD, within the interagency construct, would need to broaden its intermediate and top-level Service schools to ensure that its personnel appreciate the newly included agency's cultures, roles, and mission within the NSS. All agencies would need to adjust their formal education, and, ideally, civilian undergraduate and graduate schools would follow suit as they prepared candidates for civil and military professions.

Similar to current requirements to educate DOD personnel, the interagency community would call for additional quotas to established Service and joint schools, such as the Army Command and General Staff College and Joint Forces Staff College. Selection of candidates for a combatant command would focus on personnel who, like their military counterparts, are in mid-level management, providing seasoned individuals confident in their agencies' capabilities and who are recognized experts in their agencies' communities. Completing tours in combatant commands would furnish occupational designations for civilians similar to the mili-

tary qualifications of joint specialty officers. Prospective directors would take a capstone equivalent course to prepare for SES-level service in a regional or functional combatant command.

A complementary solution to interagency education, similar to the National Defense University, would be a National Security University that mirrors the format and intent of the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. Students from the interagency community, instead of other nations, would participate in tailored, professional education and research and dialogue, and in thorough examination of issues confronting client agencies. Students would have an opportunity to identify common values, create interagency friendships, work toward common understandings, and build a more peaceful and cooperative political and security environment. The National Security University structure would allow an open forum for security development, as opposed to the focus of defense-oriented institutions.

### Budget Wars

Aligning multiple agencies within the Government should create efficiencies and reduce redundancy. Each agency would need



to review its roles and missions, a process similar to the Quadrennial Defense Review. The entire interagency community would highlight seams and overlaps. Infrastructure, communications, and redundant personnel skills would be the first candidates for consolidation. In a study at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a team of 190 experts concluded:

*the U.S. national security apparatus requires significant reforms to meet the challenges of a new strategic era. As part of its transformational efforts, the Department of Defense must adapt not only to the post-Cold War, post-9/11 security environment but also must cope with many "hidden failures" that, while not preventing operational success, stifle necessary innovation and continue to squander critical resources in terms of time and money. Many organizational structures and processes initially constructed to contain a Cold War superpower in the Industrial Age are inappropriate for 21<sup>st</sup>-century missions in an Information Age.<sup>7</sup>*

DOD, as the largest budget consumer, would gain capabilities through increased unity of effort. This type of change is feasible, and all participants must recognize that their historical contributions to the Nation, while valued, may not be efficient going forward. Various actions would help implement this construct:

- A legislative watershed event similar to the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 would serve as the catalyst for the interagency community to adopt this integrated construct.

- Achieving balance in the command positions, key principal staff billets, and action officer positions throughout the agencies would maintain viable parallel career tracks.

- Incorporation of agency policies and procedures into the combatant command's standard operating procedures would facilitate synthesis of agency cultures and perspectives.

- Recruitment and selection of personnel through professional education must target unity of effort.

- Shifting resources throughout the interagency community by capitalizing on the efficiencies gained through combining capabilities would eliminate redundancy.

## An Investment

The Goldwater-Nichols Act helped move the Department of Defense toward a more effective joint approach to warfighting, where instead of merely deconflicting, the Services were to work together in ways that created power beyond the sum of their indi-

vidual capabilities. To achieve that joint warfighting capability, each Service had to give up some turf, authorities, and prerogatives. Today, one could argue that the executive branch of Government is stovepiped much like the four Services were 20 years ago.

In 2004, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld emphasized to the 9/11 Commission the success of military institutions that looked beyond their hallowed pasts and gained more than they invested. Such landmark legislation as the Goldwater-Nichols Act adopted today could similarly unify the interagency community. The effect of Goldwater-Nichols on DOD has proven the resourcefulness of its authors in thinking beyond Service cultures and traditions. Using this construct as an interagency model provides the type of internal transformation required for external integration. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Henry Shelton, USA (Ret.), in his congressional testimony following operations in Kosovo, highlighted the need for interagency integration before and during conflict resolution:

*We all must move forward with our efforts to achieve increased levels of integrated inter-agency planning now. To better support other agencies, DOD needs to give greater consideration to political, diplomatic, humanitarian, economic, information, and other nonmilitary activities in defense planning. In addition, the U.S. Government must establish dedicated mechanisms and integrated planning processes to ensure rapid, effective, well-structured, multi-agency efforts in response to crises.<sup>8</sup>*

An investment in personnel and education would allow agencies to communicate and coordinate in an unprecedented manner. It is not enough to synchronize during complex contingency operations; the interagency community must integrate into a team with a common focus and complementary

capabilities. The entity that could conduct this type of coordination is an integrated, interagency unified combatant command.

The headquarters and staffing model outlined here provides a framework for effective deterrence and engagement. Empower-

## one could argue that the executive branch is stovepiped much like the Services were 20 years ago

ing the combatant commander with all the instruments of national power will allow unprecedented capabilities. Inherent in the structure is accountability of civil-military cooperation, but that natural tension is harnessed into a model that maximizes unity of effort. **JFQ**

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> National Security Council, *National Security Council's Function*, available at <[www.whitehouse.gov/nsc](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc)>.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Garamone, "Pace Proposes Interagency Goldwater-Nichols Act," American Forces Press Service, September 7, 2004, available at <[www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2004/n09072004\\_200409077.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2004/n09072004_200409077.html)>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Strohm, "Former Commander Calls for New Military-Civilian Planning Organization," December 7, 2004, available at <[www.govexec.com/dailyfed/1204/120704c1.htm](http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/1204/120704c1.htm)>.

<sup>6</sup> *The National Security Strategy of the United States for Combating Terrorism*, February 2003, available at <[www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> Clark A. Murdock et al., *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era*, Phase I Report (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2004), 6, available at <[www.csis.org/isp/gn/](http://www.csis.org/isp/gn/)>.

<sup>8</sup> Henry H. Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Posture Statement before the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress, U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, February 8, 2000.

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